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Introduction

Current visions of TAML₂

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This special issue comprises a selection of studies on the acquisition of tense, aspect and modality (TAM) in second languages (L₂) which aim to gain insight into the acquiring and learning of TAM representations, as this is one of the most challenging tasks for second language learners (Comajoan, 2014).

The seven articles are based on talks presented at the 3rd edition of TAML₂ (Tense, Aspect and Modality in a Second Language) in Leiden, The Netherlands which brought together researchers working on different aspects of the acquisition, learning and teaching of TAM in second languages. The papers cover research on (a) aspectual, temporal and modal representations in an L₂; (b) pedagogical implications of TAML₂ research findings; (c) methodological issues; and (d) contributions to theory building. These research topics are a reflection of a widely recognized need for an updated knowledge base and for innovative methodological tools in the study of temporal, aspectual and modal representations in a second language (see McManus, Vanek, Leclercq, & Roberts, 2017 and Salaberry, 2018).

The first article by Verkuyl argues that the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen, 1986), which to date still dominates a great part of TAML₂ studies, suffers from being based on naïve physics assumed by language philosophers and needs to be reevaluated. Due to their understanding of aspect, a verb has been taken as a predicate rather than as a linguistic unit with its own lexical meaning. This article puts forward the need of understanding the availability of the verb to accept a wide variety of arguments.

González and Diaubalick's pilot study on the understudied language combination Dutch-Spanish highlights the importance of methodological questions in TAM research: only in certain experiments, an L₁-effect was revealed. Especially due to the high complexity of TAM features, such task effects are not unknown (see Domínguez, Tracy-Ventura, Arche, Michell, & Myles, 2013). The findings of this paper, however, show possible interactions between these effects and a learner's L₁. Only by taking all results together, a tendency to overgeneralize the Imperfect was visible. Interestingly, this contrasts to findings on English-speaking

learners where the Preterit is the preferred past tense form (as shown, for example, by Quintana Hernández's paper). The comparison between these two studies exemplifies the saliency of the L1 factor.

In the same line, a further paper on methodological issues by Domínguez pleads for a 'mixed methods' approach, suggesting, for example, the combination of collecting oral production data with an elicitation experiment. Several findings show that, this way, existing hypotheses can be investigated more reliably. The results should therefore advise future research to combine several approaches as acquisitional challenges may not be visible throughout every task.

By means of a study in a setting of L3 acquisition, Eibensteiner's paper shows that aspectual knowledge successfully acquired in an L2 is able to accelerate the tense-aspect system in an L3, even if this latter system is more complex. Evidence comes from German-speaking participants whose L1 lacks grammatical aspect (Andersson, 2004). By dividing the participant group in two with respect to their understanding of the progressive form in their L2 English, findings show that those learners who have acquired this form can transfer the concept of progressivity to L3 Spanish, which leads them to outperform those learners with lower scores on a test of L2 aspectual knowledge. That is, the basic aspectual contrast found in the English system (Salaberry & Ayoun, 2005) can serve as a basis for understanding a more complex system such as the Spanish one.

Böhm's study contributes to the analysis of the epistemic modal and evidential use of the Spanish imperfect. By analyzing journalistic text, it is shown that the imperfect forms do not only denote imperfective aspect but are also able to indicate hearsay. That is, by using the imperfect journalists clarify their distance to the narrated events in order to acquit themselves from (legal) responsibility. Since this special use of the narrative imperfect is often neglected in class of Spanish as foreign language, the paper offers an important contribution to linguistic descriptions.

The paper by Quintana Hernández presents the findings of a study on the past tenses with English-speaking learners of L2 Spanish. The results confirm that the Preterit is the preferred past but its use crucially depends on lexical features such as dynamicity, punctuality and telicity. These patterns are interpreted as evidence of an L1 transfer interacting with effects by lexical aspect. Importantly, said interactions depend crucially on the learners' proficiency level as not all effects are globally visible throughout the population.

Finally, Solá's article contains the results of a preliminary study in which the Spanish subjunctive mood is introduced to L2 learners following a Cognitive-Operative approach (Ruiz Campillo, 2004). This approach aims to explain all uses of the subjunctive without the need for adding a list of exceptions. The results of applying this single operative value approach in class show that the learners' ability to select between moods can be significantly improved.

One observation which is certainly strengthened by all papers is that cross-linguistically, languages can vary significantly in how the concepts of temporality, aspectuality and modality are grammatically expressed by the different verb forms. Especially Spanish as a member of the Romance languages is characterized by a high complexity in its verb system when compared to Germanic languages (Salaberry, 2008). However, the articles in this volume show that not all these languages differ from Spanish in the same way. Due to that reasons, Germanic-speaking learners of L2 Spanish do not perform homogeneously: whereas all groups – German-, Dutch- and English-speaking learners – show to have difficulties with grammatical aspect in Spanish, the way in how these difficulties are tried to be resolved differ clearly. The English-speaking learners show a preference of the Preterit; the Dutch learners tend to use the Imperfect. Interestingly, the German learners seem to be the ones facing the greatest challenges and can even profit from previous knowledge of English. Such observations should encourage researchers not to neglect seemingly insignificant or subtle cross-linguistic differences (González & Diaubalick, in press).

Importantly, the special issue also allows for deducing pedagogical implications. For example, from the paper by Eibensteiner, we can learn that teachers of an L3 may do well in explicitly comparing the L3 to potential L2's that the learner already knows as this may lead to positive transfer. Another clear pedagogical implication for teaching TAM comes from the study by Solá. Especially if future research would confirm that students are able to use the distinction to choose between indicative and subjunctive mood in production, we would have a clear implication for pedagogy. As Solá rightly notes, however, it is of vital importance to get teachers on board when it comes to introducing mood by means of a single conceptual pair.

Taking all these papers together, this special issue allows us to improve our TAML2 vision of linguistic theory, language learning and second language acquisition (SLA). Both theoretical and practical implications of the research on acquisition and learning of TAM are discussed.

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